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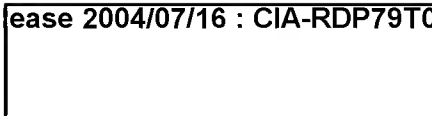
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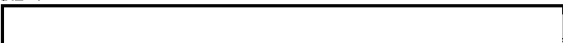
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THE USSR
27 January 1977

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THE USSR will be published and distributed on Thursdays.

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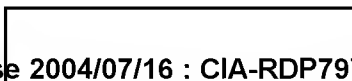

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Sino-Soviet Border Talks: Stuck but Continuing

The current phase of the Sino-Soviet border talks is nearing the end of its second month in Peking. Most information so far indicates that it is as unproductive as the previous phases of the talks, which have continued periodically since October 1969. The Chinese, in fact, are taking great pains to stress to foreign officials, probably in response to Western speculation that Sino-Soviet relations may improve now that Mao is dead, that their position versus the Soviets remains every bit as unyielding as before.

As of January 7, only four plenary sessions of the talks had apparently been held since chief Soviet negotiator Ilichev arrived in Peking on November 27 to end an 18-month stand-down in the negotiations. Three of these sessions had taken place by December 18 and the fourth, according to Chinese delegation head Yu Chan, was held three weeks later on January 7. Yu Chan, in fact, spent 10 days away from the talks escorting a visiting Romanian government delegation around China from 15 to 24 December.

Information on how the talks have traditionally been conducted is sparse, but presumably the pace varies according to whether new initiatives are being discussed or whether both sides are just marking time. One Soviet participant remarked in 1971 that at the inception of the talks daily sessions lasted 6 to 7 hours. A few comments from both sides since that time indicate that the talks have varied from monthly to weekly meetings--not all of which are plenary sessions.

The basic stumbling block in the talks has been Peking's insistence that Moscow pull back its troops from all disputed areas before a new border can be demarcated, and Moscow's unwillingness to do so. The disputed areas, according to the Chinese, involve real estate other than what was taken from China by the "unjust" border treaties of the 17th through the 19th centuries. This includes primarily islands in the eastern border rivers and a

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section of land in the Pamirs at the western end of the border. The Soviets have presented a variety of negotiating packages over the years to get around the basic Chinese demand for a troop withdrawal, but have been unwilling to concede in principle any unjust Russian occupation of Chinese land. Most of the Soviets' efforts have been aimed at negotiating the issues on a case by case basis, an approach which Peking has so far refused to accept.

Ilichev presumably returned to Peking with a new package of proposals, but Chinese officials in Peking and elsewhere have been quick to stress that the Soviets have made no changes in principle, and that the talks are again stalled.

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In the past, the Soviets have proposed mutual troop withdrawals in some limited sectors along the border, only to be rebuffed by the Chinese who apparently deemed such limited withdrawals inadequate. In any case, China considers only Soviet held territory to be in dispute and only Soviet troop pullbacks as appropriate. Ilichev may indeed have presented some variation on this former proposal.

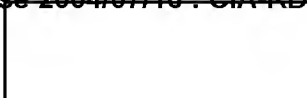
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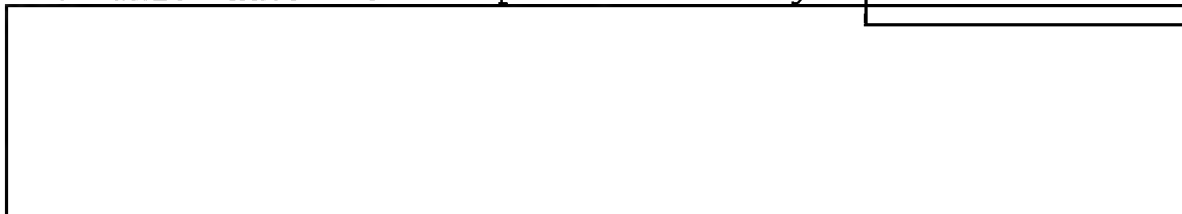
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The talks in Peking have not been limited solely to discussions of border areas. After the issue was originally raised by the Chinese in 1969, the Soviets presented a variety of proposals advocating nonuse of force, none of which have been acceptable to Peking.

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Although no progress apparently is being made on any of the issues, the Soviets may well wish to keep Ilichev in Peking for some time. The border talks provide the most intensive forum for Soviet-Chinese exchanges, and Moscow certainly initiated this round to probe for any sign of change in Chinese attitudes following Mao's death.

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The Soviets will almost certainly want to maintain this unique listening post for as long as possible to look for hints of the direction the current fluid situation in Peking may take and to search for any signs of change in attitude toward the USSR. If Peking is being as unyielding as its diplomats indicate, Moscow probably at least hopes that there will be some change in attitude if the Chinese leaders are disappointed by the new US administration. It would be useful for Ilichev to be in Peking to pick up any such signals. In addition, a hasty withdrawal by Ilichev would be an acknowledgment to the world that Moscow had been unable to break its impasse with Peking--an admission that the Soviets presumably will be reluctant to make.

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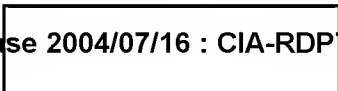
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Brezhnev's Maneuvers Against the Belorussian Faction

6 Over the last year, a number of signs have suggested that a shift may be quietly occurring in the balance of power within the Soviet leadership as a result of a noticeable decline in the political strength of the Belorussian faction. The senior member of this faction, Politburo member K. T. Mazurov, has lost his status as the only first deputy chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers and has simultaneously suffered a marked downgrading in protocol status. To a lesser degree the political position of Mazurov's former Minsk subordinate and protege, Petr Masherov, first secretary of Belorussia and a candidate Politburo member, appears to have slipped as well. Whether this decline represents an irreversible trend is uncertain. Nevertheless, the decline in Mazurov's status weakens the likelihood of his succeeding Kosygin as the next chairman of the Council of Ministers. Given Mazurov's difficulties, Masherov may have problems in maintaining his strong and seemingly secure position in the Belorussian apparatus.

The Rise of the Belorussian Faction

6 The prominence of the Belorussian faction dates back to a major political breakthrough achieved in the months following Khrushchev's 1964 removal. It was at this point that Mazurov, then first secretary of the republic, was moved to Moscow, promoted to full Politburo status, and made a first deputy to Kosygin. These assignments represented the highest government and party positions ever reached by a Belorussian in the Soviet leadership. As a result of Mazurov's transfer to Moscow, Second Secretary Masherov was made Belorussian first secretary and given the candidate Politburo rank that normally attaches to the post. The effect of these developments was to give the Belorussian faction greater political weight within national party councils than its size or previous political importance would merit.

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After their initial success in 1965, however, Mazurov and Masherov have been unable to climb further. There is some reason to believe that this has been due to continuing friction with General Secretary Brezhnev. Mazurov and Masherov appear to have been both politically and personally cool to Brezhnev, and neither has participated in the development of the Brezhnev cult to any significant degree. In fact, Masherov has in the past been notably unenthusiastic about detente, heavily stressing the dangers of ideological infiltration from the West at a time when Brezhnev was becoming increasingly committed to expanding relations with the West. Both Mazurov and Masherov may also have had an early career association with Aleksandr Shelepin, a rival of Brezhnev during much of his tenure as general secretary. Shelepin was a secretary of the All-Union Komsomol when Mazurov was picked to head the Belorussian Komsomol in 1946 and when Masherov took over Mazurov's position a year later. More recently, Mazurov is reported to have participated with Shelepin and Suslov in an attack on Brezhnev's leadership in 1970.

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Despite these reasons for Brezhnev to feel animus toward him, Mazurov's career did not suffer immediately. Although Shelepin's status in the leadership declined dramatically in Brezhnev's ranking of Politburo members at the 24th party congress in 1971, Mazurov's position improved slightly, ranking seventh in the leadership and above all his generational peers.

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The security of Mazurov's political position was seemingly confirmed in 1972 and 1973. He was chosen to give the October anniversary speech in 1972, although it was not his turn to do so. He had previously given the address in 1968, and both Kosygin and Polyansky among government officials should have been due for a second appearance before Mazurov. Moreover, at the Supreme Soviet sessions in 1973 Mazurov delivered a major report on education, even though such visibility for Politburo members at these sessions had become infrequent during the Brezhnev era. Finally, Mazurov's main rival to succeed Kosygin, Dmitry Polyansky, was demoted in 1973 to minister of agriculture, leaving Mazurov as Kosygin's sole first deputy.

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These developments appeared at the time to improve the likelihood that Mazurov would eventually replace

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6 Kosygin as chairman of the Council of Ministers. He had in effect become the logical bureaucratic choice. Moreover, he was well qualified for the job. He has held leadership positions for almost 30 years in the party and government at the national, republic, and oblast levels. He has been directly concerned with management of the industrial sector of the economy since coming to Moscow, and he has also acquired some foreign policy experience from his frequent contacts with foreign leaders in Moscow and occasional visits abroad. Compared to the rather narrow career experience of other potential Soviet leaders, the breadth of Mazurov's experience is impressive.

Political Decline

But despite Mazurov's increased status in the leadership, there were indications as early as May 1973 that his position as the only first deputy chairman was being challenged, and it is probable that Brezhnev was behind this development.

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In spite of these efforts, Brezhnev has not been entirely successful. [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED] It would appear that opposition persists within the leadership to Brezhnev's desire to make personnel changes that would tend to alter the political balance within the Politburo. Kosygin and Mazurov seem likely to have led this opposition, with the probable support of Suslov. It appears that even Brezhnev's limited success [REDACTED] occurred only when Kosygin was physically incapacitated.

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5 Notwithstanding these apparent limitations on Brezhnev's power, Mazurov's position in the leadership has declined noticeably in 1976. He was out of public view for prolonged periods of time--the longest from early June until early September. He was also the only Moscow-based Politburo member not out of the country on official assignments who missed any of the preliminary birthday award ceremonies for Brezhnev in December 1976. Mazurov missed all six. Finally, he was the only Moscow-based Politburo member who did not participate in the funeral rites for Marshal Yakubovsky, also in December.

Mazurov has, however, had health problems in the past [REDACTED]

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7 6 [REDACTED] It is therefore possible that his prolonged and unexplained absences in 1976 during the Brezhnev celebrations, and during part of Kosygin's recuperation from his accident and illness are at least partly attributable to poor health. Nevertheless, Mazurov's incapacity at critical times may have contributed to weakening his position in the leadership and made the elevation of Tikhonov to first deputy chairman impossible to defeat.

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Mazurov has also been downgraded through the subtle use of protocol arrangements on several occasions since his return to activity in September. Although his formal ranking in leadership name lists has declined only slightly during the year, pictures of thy leadership appearing in *Pravda* on September 6 (Brezhnev's return to Moscow from Alma-Ata), October 14 (Kirilenko's award presentation), and November 2 (presentation of an award to Brezhnev by Czechoslovak party leader Husak) suggest a reduction in status. More important, the group picture of the leadership at the December 19 award ceremony placed him at the far end of the group, next to candidate Politburo member Demichev, another leader thought to be in political difficulty.

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In addition, Tikhonov appears to have been given responsibilities in the government formerly performed by Mazurov. It is traditional for the second-ranking governmental figure to sign decrees of the Council of Ministers in Kosygin's absence. Mazurov performed this function 21 times in the first half of 1976 when he was the only first deputy. Since June 4, however, Mazurov has performed this function only once, on November 25, even though Kosygin was ill and absent from work from August until late October. By comparison, Tikhonov has deputized for Kosygin in this role on 20 occasions since August 3. As Mazurov has been publicly active since early September, his apparent loss of most of this responsibility to Tikhonov must be assumed to represent a further downgrading of his position.

Political Prospects

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Despite these indications of political difficulty for Mazurov, he apparently has some support within the leadership. In addition to the fact that Tikhonov has not yet attained Politburo membership, Mazurov in November published his first major article in four years, which appeared in the party's leading theoretical journal, *Kommunist*. Also, Mazurov's political base in Belorussia has at least until recently remained under the secure control of his former subordinate, Masherov. While Mazurov and Masherov appear to disagree on a few policy questions, their careers are closely linked. In the 12 years since Mazurov left the republic, Masherov

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has led a group of men whose careers originated and flourished in Belorussia, most of whom were politically powerful under Mazurov as well. Of the current 16 full and candidate members of the Belorussian party bureau, 11 had held major republic apparatus or obkom assignments under Mazurov. Only three individuals (the current second secretary, the agriculture secretary, and the head of the party organs department) have come to prominence since Masherov took over in 1965.

6 While no apparent attempt has been made to undermine Mazurov's political connections in Belorussia, such a move remains a possibility in the future. The proceedings at the October 1976 plenum of the CPSU Central Committee have already provided an indication that Masherov may be in some political difficulty. Only Masherov among the candidate and full members of the Politburo with territorial responsibilities did not speak at the plenum. His place was taken by Kiselev, the chairman of the Belorussian Council of Ministers.

6 The degree of control still exercised by Masherov and Mazurov over Belorussian affairs may be tested in the near future. The accidental death of the president of the Presidium of the Belorussian Supreme Soviet has created a vacancy in a senior position within the Belorussian hierarchy. This vacancy could be used by Moscow to inject an "outsider" into the Belorussian leadership in order to tighten central control. This practice has been used frequently in non-Slavic republics, but Moscow has not interfered in major personnel appointments in Belorussia in this way over the last 20 years. In view of the remarkable continuity in the leadership of the republic during this time, such intervention by Moscow in filling this vacancy would represent a serious political setback for the Mazurov-Masherov faction.

6 Alternatively, Moscow could make a slightly less threatening change by realigning the existing Belorussian leadership. A Belorussian official more closely associated with the Brezhnev faction could be promoted. A. A. Smirnov, a Belorussian Central Committee secretary with responsibility for industry, is the only leader in the Belorussian party bureau who appears to have such connections. If he is promoted to a senior

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[redacted]

position such as republic party second secretary as a result of the reassignment of other leading cadres, Mazurov's and Masherov's hold on the republic party machine will be damaged.

6 It remains uncertain whether this vacancy will be used as a political lever against Mazurov and Masherov's position in Belorussia, or whether Tikhonov will finally achieve Politburo status. Either development, however, would appear to signal a further weakening of the Belorussian group and indicate that their long-term prospects in a Brezhnev-directed transition are not good.

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